



CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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**Environment Committee Public Hearing
March, 7, 2022**

**Commissioner Bryan P. Hurlburt
Testimony in Support Of:
HB 5295: AN Act Concerning Agriculture Development and Innovation**

Senator Cohen, Representative Gresko, Senator Miner, Representative Harding, and honorable members of the Environment Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of the Department of Agriculture's agency bill, HB 5295: An Act Concerning Agriculture Development and Innovation. My name is Bryan Hurlburt, and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture.

Section 1: 22-11c

Section 1 of this bill includes "long lines" in the definition of aquaculture. This is an update to reflect current aquaculture practices. Long lines are currently used in Long Island Sound for aquaculture production of kelp and the inclusion of long line gear type technology in the definition ensures it is considered aquaculture under existing statutes.

Section 2: 22-26e- Governor's Council on Agricultural Innovation

Section 2 of this bill would reconstitute and restructure the Governor's Council on Agricultural Development to the "Governor's Council on Agricultural Innovation." This proposal redefines the goals of the council, restructures the appointments of the members, and outlines new goals and metrics for the council.

In 2011, Governor Malloy and my predecessor Commissioner Reviczky developed, passed, and organized the Governor's Council on Agricultural Development (GCAD). This council pulled in leaders from across the industry to identify challenges, priorities, and potential solutions to support the agricultural industry.

One of the ways GCAD was successful was because it provided a space for everyone to focus and identify what the industry as a whole should be addressing and how to go about it. This concept would reconstitute the council, with some revisions;

The first is to modify leadership of the Council, by adding the Director of the Connecticut Agriculture Experiment Station as a co-vice-chair. This is in addition to the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Connecticut, and with the Commissioner of Agriculture remaining as chair. This revision would recognize the important role that both UCONN and CAES hold as leaders of the industry to drive change and support those changes.



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The second change is the charge of the council to “increase agriculture in Connecticut by developing innovative market opportunities, including urban agriculture, integration and adoption of new technology, controlled environment agriculture, and diversification of products and opportunities.” This charge is neither too broad, nor too limiting, and would allow the council to explore the scope of an industry that is constantly evolving. Just this session, we have seen legislative proposals encompassing innovative agriculture, such as hydroponics and this council would be able to expand on those ideas.

Following our discussions with industry members, such as Connecticut Farm Bureau, we would ask for the following revisions to this concept.

- Revise the name of the council to “Governor’s Council on Agricultural Development and Innovation”
- In subsection (c), any vacancy in the membership of the council shall be filled by the Chair and co-chairs of the council.

Section 3: 22-26bb Subdivision of PDR

Section 3 of this bill allows for the subdivision of PDR (Purchase of Development Rights) properties in future PDR properties, as approved by the Commissioner of Agriculture. After discussing the proposal with various agricultural stakeholders, I respectfully request that this section be removed from the bill.

In 2021, 13 farms, covering 1,204 acres were protected through DoAg’s Farmland Preservation Unit and there are currently 38 active PDR projects for over 2,100 acres of Connecticut farmland.

Section 4: 22-47 Eggs

Section 4 creates a consumer protection provision for those who purchase chicken eggs from farms. Eggs would need to be clean, stored at a temperature forty-five degrees or less, (for example, in a cooler), unadulterated, and labeled. There was concern last year that cleaning the eggs would be cumbersome to the farmers, however, we have clarified that clean simply means free of dirt and debris and that no additional measures are necessary.

These standards are in line with traditional farmers’ market practices and are not intended to create an undue burden to our farmers. The intention is that anyone purchasing eggs from a farm, farm stand, or market is getting the highest quality, clean egg possible.

Section 5: Rabbit processing



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Section 5 of this bill would allow for the processing of rabbits for consumption. DoAg supports the ability for farmers to engage in direct sales to household consumers, restaurants, hotels, boarding houses, and retail food establishments. As consumers increase their interest and awareness of locally raised and produced foods, this proposal would create the opportunity for them to purchase locally raised rabbit meat.

We would recommend a small producer exemption, similar to what the legislature did years ago for poultry operations, which would open up markets for small farms and would give consumers additional opportunities to support local businesses.

We would recommend that the bill be enhanced by including licensing and enforcement provisions, similar to standards already in place:

(NEW)(a) Definitions

(1) "Producer" means any individual or entity engaged in the raising or keeping of not more than 1,000 rabbits of any breed in a calendar year for the purpose of food production; and

(2) "Rabbit Processing Facility" means any facility operated by a producer and located in the state which is intended for the slaughter of rabbits for food for human consumption.
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(b) A producer shall register with the Commissioner of Agriculture on a biennial basis.

(c) The Commissioner of Agriculture, or designee, shall be the state official in charge of inspecting any producer that also operates as a rabbit processing facility. Any inspection conducted pursuant to this subsection shall be consistent with the requirements of the applicable provisions of the Code of Federal Regulations Title 9 Part 301.2, Title 9 Part 354 and Title 21 Part 101, including, but not limited to standards for labeling, packaging, animal health, facility design and construction, sanitation and product safety. Rabbit processing facilities that have passed a facility inspection and have implemented a written program to control reasonably likely to occur microbiological, physical or chemical hazards pursuant to this subsection shall be designated as approved food sources for direct sale to household consumers, restaurants, hotels, boarding houses and retail food establishments.

(d) The Commissioner of Agriculture may adopt regulations, pursuant to chapter 54, to implement this section, including, but not limited to registration requirements, and operating standards for rabbit processing facilities.

When this bill was heard before the Environment Committee last session, there was testimony submitted requesting a state plan to address Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHDV2). The United States Department of Agriculture does not currently have an official program for Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease.

Currently the State Veterinarian at the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's Wildlife Division are working closely to monitor RHDV2 and we are committed to continued partnership with DEEP to monitor this disease as it relates to



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domestic and wild rabbits. We do not believe that any actions made as a result of this bill would result in an outbreak of RHDV2 in Connecticut.

Section 6: DMV- CT Grown

Section 6 of this bill would create a “CT-Grown” license plate to support and promote Connecticut agriculture.

In 2020, the Department of Agriculture partnered with Miranda Creative to launch a full service marketing campaign, with the goal of shaping and identifying an overall marketing approach for the Connecticut Grown Brand and Connecticut’s agricultural industry.

During 2021, the Connecticut Grown rebranding and marketing campaign was able to reach 100 million impressions; that was exceeded with over 112,000,000 to date. That campaign also:

- **Conducted extensive research** including three different surveys and four hours of focus groups to develop a new tagline and rebranded of the logo;
- **Established buy-in from the industry** through targeted outreach and inclusion;
- **Updated both the consumer and agency logos;**
- **Launched the rebranded Connecticut Grown** program in March 2021;
- **Grew social media** with 2,191 new Facebook followers, and started Instagram page with 1,712 followers to date;
- Negotiated a unique **digital billboard** contract allowing state-wide exposure at a fraction of the cost by adopting cancelled/open spaces with visibility in Hartford, Meriden, New Haven, Fairfield, Waterbury, Farmington, and East Hartford;
- **Garnered diverse media coverage** from major broadcast television networks, print media and radio;
- **Engaged with producers** by providing marketing workshops to assist their brand development and incorporate CT Grown branding; and
- **Achieved well-rounded marketing exposure** by utilizing billboards, press releases, earned media, website, radio, broadcast TV, display advertising, search advertising, digital streaming, email marketing and social media (paid and organic) as well as event promotion at the Big E.

The 2021 campaign also established a number of ‘firsts’ for the agency and consumer facing brand:

- Designed the **first consumer website**, www.CTGrown.org with more than 47,000 pageviews since the March 2021 launch;
- Created the **first blog and events listing** on the consumer website;
- **Integrated CT Grown with CTVisit.com** to give agritourism a voice in state-wide visitor messaging;
- Developed the agency’s **first photo/video pantry** featuring multiple farms, restaurants and farm stands throughout the state. These assets were shared with farms that hosted us to obtain these photos;



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- Created the **first dashboard, integrating Google analytics and Mailchimp** to optimize performance;
- Designed and sent **first consumer emails** to more than 640,000 email addresses with 12,557 click-throughs, capturing our first retargeted IP capture process and developed a subscriber list of 3,728 Mailchimp subscribers averaging 34.47% open rate;
- Implemented **first search campaign using keywords** to establish retargeted display advertising to further messaging and branding impact with a total of 238,264 impressions and overall CTR of 3.34%;
- Leveraged **first digital display campaign** to generate more than 1.408 million impressions across devices and web; and
- Established **first creative pantry** including templates and standards for brand, social media posts, billboards, digital ads, videos, radio scripts, stationery, specialty items, outreach, blogs, e-newsletters and more.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Connecticut residents have stepped up to support local businesses, and that includes Connecticut farmers. By identifying local products as “CT Grown”, residents know that they are getting a locally sourced item and supporting their local economy.

The CT Grown license plate will feature the new CT grown logo and the proceeds from this commemorative license plate will go directly to the marketing and support of the CT Grown brand.

Section 7:

Section 7 would repeal the Interagency Aquaculture Coordinating Committee, which has not been active in a number of years, and the Aquaculture Advisory Council which was never seated.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this bill. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time and the Departments liaison, Kayleigh Royston is available to you at Kayleigh.Royston@ct.gov